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SOCIAL-DIFFERENCES AND PROBLEM OF IDENTITY IN *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS*

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Abstract:-What is meant by sexual differences? Feminists have pointed to the way in which, historically, a natural differences between men and women was assumed, and have analyzed the ways in which this difference was given various social, political and economic meanings in different societies and civilizations. They argue that one constant of this differentiation, however, has been that women have been given an inferior or secondary status in societies because of this assumed natural sexual difference.

Keywords:Social-Differences , The Mill On The Floss , historically.

INTRODUCTION

The secondary status of women can be explained by the fact that within the multiplicity of cultural conceptions and symbolizations of women that exist and that have existed in different societies, there is a constant in that women are seen as being “closer to nature” in their physiology, their social role and their psyche. Whereas women have been seen as “closer to nature”, men have been perceived as “closer to culture,” more suited for public roles and political association. For this reason, women have been relegated to a secondary status in society, often confined to role in the home rather than able to accede to powerful public positions.

The concept of difference between men and women still prevails in society. A key problem that feminist identity in this continuing perception of difference is that it is almost impossible to escape the formation of social hierarchies based on these perceptions and representations of difference. In fact, feminists argue, the idea of difference is never neutral in its effects on social structures. Contemporary social policy and the structuring of welfare, for example, involve discussions about whether men and women should be treated identically with respect to benefits or whether relevant differences should be taken into account. Although same but different, it seems impossible to argue for difference without creating same kind of hierarchy. Feminists have, therefore, to develop different strategies to cope with this question to difference: either denying it, or emphasizing it and giving it a positive value.

George Eliot is a British woman writer who has written many novels which revolve around women and *The Mill On The Floss* is one them. In this novel she depicts Maggie as a feministic figure who surpasses all criticism and prejudices on her way.

Maggie is discriminated at every stage of her life. Her parents discriminate between Maggie and her brother Tom while raising them. He is allowed to play outside with his friends and Maggie is asked to behave in a girl-like manner. Her mother insists her to wear “filled” dresses and do her hair nicely which she does not like. She wants to make her a meek and docile girl who will be an excellent product for marriage. Maggie is not given proper education unlike his brother because her father thinks that education is not a women’s business; she is just meant for marriage. Although she is more intelligent than her brother, she is not given an opportunity to work on her skills.

But her conflict with her family and society begins when she reaches adulthood. Her brother tries to control her social and personal relationships. He does not allow her to meet Philip, her childhood friend. He orders her to sit in the house and wait for her marriage. He does not even allow her to work and earn for the family. He thinks that it

will be a disgrace for the family if his sister goes out and works. Maggie, keeps accepting his instructions because that is what women were expected to do in the nineteenth century England. But what differentiates these characters is their courage to fight back against this discrimination. These women express their displeasure against patriarchal structure in different manner.

Maggie Tulliver happens to elope with her suitor, Stephen Guest; her boat drifts when she is in her fantasy world. She has the choice to marry her love Stephen who proposes her that day. But she chooses to return to the town where she is discarded by her family and society. The public opinion is against Maggie as she has returned without a husband, and in a 'degraded and outcast condition' (Eliot 503). She is considered to be prompted by "unwomanly boldness" and "unbridled passion". Stephen sends a letter describing all that was happened between him and Maggie but it fails to save Maggie's reputation. Rather he is considered a gentleman who had fallen at the hands of an intriguing woman. The irony of the situation is that Maggie is not believed when she herself tells what was happened to her. But "a letter" by Stephen is considered trustworthy and is given primary importance. People consider him a gentlemen who is ready to take the blame on his shoulders to save the reputation of a low-woman. When she tries to face the townspeople so that she can prove her innocence to the priest, she is addressed as a shameless girl who can ruin the character of other girls in the town. They wonder that how can she stay in St. Ogg's after committing such a blunder.

In all this turmoil, when mere survival has become a problem for her, she does not stop thinking about earning for herself. She tells Dr. Kenn, "The only thing I want is some occupation that will enable me to get my bread and be independent" (509). This is very radical idea on a woman's part who lives in society where marriage is considered the only occupation meant for women. She does not want to be a parasite for Bob, Tom's childhood friend, too who is ready to support her. It seems to be her effort to earn her freedom actually.

Maggie was aware of the criticism which were to follow on her return to the town but this would not curb her desire to go back and settle in the same town. That is why, this act of hers is more significant than others; the courage to face an indifferent, male society makes her a feminist being. Dr. Kenn thinks, she has chosen "the steep and difficult path of a return...when that return was most of all difficult (Eliot 508).

CONCLUSION:

So, these are some questions that lead feminists to argue again over the existence of women's biological social differences from men and about the best strategies for ending women's subordinate position in society, either through claiming equality or stating their difference. Clearly, this debate is also complicated by differences among women themselves, differences of class, race, age, sexual orientation and so on. And an additional complicating factor in this debate is the fact that women's supposed differences from men have been used over the centuries to justify discrimination against women and their exclusion from full social and political citizenship. Similarly, Maggie in her elopement with Stephen and returning to the town proves herself as a very bold, strong woman who is ready to face all the criticism thrown at her.

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